Shana Tova. Four months ago, we came to a decision as an executive board that I would speak today, the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Allow me to set the scene for you. Jen announced that we needed to choose a speaker for each of the High Holy Day services. A hush filled the room and I kept my head down, avoiding any eye contact. I’m assuming others did too because an uncomfortable silence was broken by Harvey, ever the calm voice of reason, “you know, it really is the responsibility of executive board members to speak to the congregation.” Believe me, it sounds incredibly persuasive when he says it. I had an out of body experience as I heard a voice that sounded like mine sheepishly offer, ”I’ll do it.”

Several days later, when I started to consider the message I wanted to convey, my thoughts kept returning to one burning question….Why did I volunteer to address the congregation? After all, I fulfill all of my duties as board secretary. I take the minutes at the meetings and get them distributed in a timely. I attend most holiday services and several social events each year. Wasn’t that good enough? And there it was. What exactly constitutes “Good enough?”

There have been countless articles and blogs touting the value of the “Good enough” mother. Some of us like to refer to ourselves as Beta moms. Truth be told, I often think even that is a charitable designation as I struggle and claw my way to reach delta or epsilon status. My message to you today is that I’m okay-you’re okay

Many of us hold ourselves up to the highest standards—those of the facebook moms & dads who have perfected the art of humble bragging—“What a day! - It was pouring at Tyler’s soccer tournament” (see photo of Tyler holding MVP trophy). “The auditorium was so hot and crowded for Mackenzie’s play” (that’s her as Annie surrounded by the nameless orphans) “To top it off, traffic was so bad that I was late for Tom’s promotion ceremony.” But see us smiling at the camera—we are the perfect family. Intellectually, we know that such perfection is usually a well-orchestrated illusion. But isn’t there a small part of us that enviously wonders, “how does she manage that?”

Before I had kids of my own, I was clearly primed to be an alpha mom. My poor sister suffered through the unfortunate timing of having her first child while I was in graduate school studying child development and special education. As her family grew, I was more than willing to dispense my unsolicited advice. For example: The boys watched way too much TV, particularly power rangers. She and my brother-in-law were inconsistent with their discipline and they never followed through with consequences. I could go on and on—and I did.

When I became a teacher, my pontificating only increased. If you want Johnny to learn to dress himself, wake up earlier so that he has as much time as he needs to work it through on his own. Never mind that you have four other children that you need to dress and feed and get off to school.

Flash forward several years and Karma is working overtime in the Darrow house. Our oldest, Jack, learned everything he knew from Steve on Blue’s Clues. Next came Sam, who would only answer to the name of whatever power ranger he was dressed as that week. And Molly? Well, following a school concert, a mom of classmates of both boys asked our sweet little girl, “so are you going to be smart like your brothers?’ Imagine my delight and pride when my five year old put her hand on her hip and said, like the diva she was, “No. I’m going to be dumb and popular.”

Yes, my children dressed themselves, but only because I refused to buy anything but elastic waisted pants and Velcro sneakers until they were ten. I won’t deny that more than once they showed up to preschool wearing pajamas. I have become the mother I’d so brazenly complained about in the teachers’ lounge for years. How hard is it to sign and return a permission slip within 5 days? Oh let me tell you, it’s down right impossible. Just ask Iris and Rebecca how many of my forms make it to the temple office by the deadlines.

If my earlier students’ parents could catch a glimpse of my life, they’d surely be walking around with a permanent self-satisfied grin. I know my sister is. I am far from perfect and feel so overwhelmed that I don’t allow plants in my house because it takes everything that I have to keep my 3 children alive— I would be remiss, in fact lying, if I didn’t give a great deal of credit to Bill who tirelessly battles against me to ensure that our children’s diet does not consist solely of food that is processed, modified, or served at a drive-thru window. But the reality is that I’m the only mother my kids have- and you know what I’ve finally come to realize? That’s good enough.

We can use “good enough” to describe a person’s aptitude or performance. It’s a rather generic term, yet a simple shift in emphasis changes the connotation. If you are trying out for a team, auditioning for a band or interviewing for a coveted job, consider this: how hard have you worked, how strongly do you believe in yourself? Do you approach these experiences feeling I’m good ENOUGH to make the team or I am GOOD enough to make the starting lineup? Am I good ENOUGH to make the band or am I GOOD enough to be chosen first chair? Good ENOUGH implies that you are capable of doing what is necessary—the bare minimum. Are my efforts ENOUGH to get me by? Do I contribute only what is asked or expected, flying under the radar so I don’t get called out?

Here’s an example of a conversation between a Mom and her high school student son-purely hypothetical:

“Jack, I see the assignment says using at least 1000 words, write a response to the prompt. How many words did you write?”

“1000. “

“ Really?”

“It’s good enough.”

Just as we wouldn’t accept that marginal effort from our children, I propose that we don’t accept it from ourselves. There are those among us who hand decorate cookies so beautifully and professionally, that they even offer classes to instruct others how to do it. I am not one of them. I am capable, however of cutting vegetables and pouring some ranch dressing into a bowl. One goal I’ve therefore set for myself this coming year is to stop doing the minimum by automatically signing up to send in the paper goods or utensils for every class party. Yes, someone needs to bring them, but it doesn’t have to be me EVERY time.

So how does this message translate to being a member of a community, specifically our community here at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom?

One of the things I love most about this congregation is the feeling of acceptance, regardless of my level of commitment, whether it be to religious observances, attending services or participation in the extra-curricular activities. I think this was beautifully illustrated during a learning session at last year’s intergenerational retreat—which, by the way, I highly recommend. Rabbi Mosbacher asked us all to remove our watches. He immediately corrected himself, clarifying, “As a reformed Rabbi, I won’t ask you, but rather suggest that you do this—the choice is yours.” And he meant it.

Yes, our clergy and lay leaders ask for our participation on numerous occasions in countless ways including, but not limited to, fiscal, time and service. Our varied schedules, life stages, incomes and personalities allow for some to answer that call on many different levels. The beauty of our family here is—and this I firmly believe, is that, we do not judge our members based on these levels. Every effort and contribution is recognized and appreciated.

That being said, my challenge to you all this year is to find a place where you can accentuate the GOOD and not the ENOUGH, to step outside of your comfort zone, to give a little extra, whatever that means to you. For some it may mean contributing a little more to the High Holy Days appeal; for others, it may be adjusting schedules to attend services or signing up to serve on a committee that interests you. It may be as simple as committing to quiet family time one Saturday afternoon to honor and celebrate Shabbat.

What is it that will inspire you to make that change? It would be wonderful if we all had a Harvey to quietly give us that push we sometimes need? Absent that, I hope that when those opportunities arise for you to join us and help our

congregation continue to grow and evolve, or in any area of your life that could use a little boost, that you ask yourself, “are my efforts good ENOUGH or GOOD enough?”

On behalf of my family, and the board of BHSS, I would like to wish you all a very happy and healthy new year. Shana Tova.